

AN ELL TEACHERS' GUIDE TO DEVELOPING FAMILY-SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS
IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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By
Catherine Davies-Payne

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Advisor: Dr. Paula Wilder

Abstract

The collaboration between families and schools is important to the academic journey of each English language learner, and in a post-pandemic world, it has become even more important to each student's educational process. The pandemic of 2020 brought many global challenges, with the majority of the population experiencing a new style of normal. Remote learning was difficult for many children and caregivers; however, it was especially problematic for ELL families. Many students have regressed academically, therefore it is imperative to form successful partnerships with stakeholders. This project aims to educate ELL teachers on the various methods of family-school collaboration, in conjunction with providing the necessary materials to create successful partnerships. An important element was to create a how-to manual that was considerate of the limited time teachers have for additional tasks by eliminating the need to conduct endless research outside of the manual.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my amazing husband who provided the support I needed to be able to focus on completing a master's degree. To my beautiful daughters who make every day a joy to be alive and who hopefully observed that hard work pays off. I want to thank them for being so patient and kind, especially on weekends when mummy had to work on her thesis. To my wonderful mum who had the best heart a person could have, taken from us far too soon, this one's for you!!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The collaboration of parents and school is integral to a child's academic achievement. A successful alliance between schools, families, and the community is a vital component in furthering the children's academic status and a step forward in helping them to secure a more positive future (Epstein et al, 2009). For parents of English language learners, this journey is especially challenging. Within many school districts, such families are provided with limited resources to help them overcome the hurdles of education in a country different from where they attended school, and often in a language they do not speak.

According to Mitchell (2020), as of 2020, there were more than 4.9 million children in the United States public school system who are English language learners (p. 1). As this number continues to grow, so do the number of parents and caregivers who face barriers such as language, work schedules, and resources. Many schools view parents and caregivers with limited financial resources as being more likely to be living within a challenging and stressful home life, together with having attained little to no education themselves; and as a result, their ability to be involved in supporting their children's learning and school decision making is less likely to be achieved (McCartney et al, 2007). In my experience, this has proven to be an extremely unfair judgment and one without foundation. Removing such stereotypes will help bridge the gap between parents, teachers, and students in order for English language learners to excel.

In 2020 however, life in education changed when students, faculty, and administration all left the school buildings with the thought that they would return in two weeks. Teachers were advised to just take a few items with them as they would no doubt be returning shortly. What

was to follow became a global pandemic that did not discriminate in its ability to destroy lives, and one which would change the way we teach and learn for the next two years. As a parent of two elementary-aged children at the time, I was able to observe the impact on learning as both a parent and teacher. What was to follow was possibly one of the most serious and life-threatening situations we humans have faced.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, parents and caregivers shared one commonality; homeschooling. This experience did not discriminate in terms of the level of frustration felt by the majority of parents regardless of their educational and socio-economic background. In addition to their existing duties, they then became the educator for which most were not prepared. For most parents and caregivers of elementary-aged children, it was a constant battle to retain their children's attention and focus. However, this journey was further aggravated by the loss of jobs and finances; for many families, the burden of worry together with the additional duty of homeschooling was a step too far.

According to Kochhar and Bennett (2021), "Job loss was the primary stressor facing immigrant families, and it had cascading effects. Immigrants in the US experienced higher unemployment after COVID-19 than U.S.-born workers" (p. 2). In my role as a teacher of multilingual learners at the elementary level, the social worker and I visited many of our Spanish-speaking families to offer support to those who seem to be struggling the most. What I witnessed was so unbelievably sad and I will always reflect on that time, families on the brink of becoming homeless due to all sources of income lost. Many of the family's incomes relied heavily on the hospitality and construction industries, all of which were affected by severe job losses. Their children's education was understandably taking less of a priority due to survival becoming the number one goal.

Purpose of the Project

For the purpose of this study, I would like to focus on what we as educators learned from the homeschooling period, and how this can be integrated into reshaping the home-school relationship. With the sheer amount of job losses, many parents and caregivers were forced into being the primary support and educator; the only positive of this was that they were provided with a window into their child's learning experience, witnessing daily what was being taught and how their child learned. Teachers were able to gain an insight into their students' home lives in a way that had previously not been possible, this also allowed caregivers and teachers to create more humanized relationships.

In my own experience, many of my student's caregivers were in the background observing and often offering words of encouragement and guidance. Most felt comfortable asking me questions or engaging in conversation and I often reflect on how special those moments were. One particular caregiver would mop the floor around her child during our small group lessons. I quickly learned she was listening and observing how her child was progressing. The student had been facing many academic challenges which the mother had previously struggled to comprehend. She emailed during this time to advise she was now able to see her daughter's struggles and asked what we could do together to help her child. What, as educators, did we learn from this and how can this shape future relationships?

The goal of the project is to create a how-to manual for ELL teachers focused on multilingual language learners' family involvement. As many of my families continue to struggle with the aftermath of the pandemic, the manual will educate teachers on how to involve parents in a post-pandemic world that is considerate of time, language barriers, and financial constraints. It is imperative to nurture the empowerment online learning provided to many of the

families, who previously felt intimidated and overwhelmed by an education system unfamiliar to them. Introducing a parent group aimed at Spanish speakers to allow them to become leaders and advocates for their children's education is just one way to embrace the confidence so many parents have gained.

The role of a teacher is multifaceted and so many demands are forced on them, that it becomes overwhelming to add yet another requirement such as creating a strong home-school connection. This is especially true for new teachers entering the profession. The manual aims to provide all the necessary information and tools, and eliminate the need to conduct intensive research for ideas. The manual structures involvement at varying levels to accommodate for all families' available time. The resources allow for teachers to incorporate all caregivers, whether they are provided once a week with a read-aloud, or being part of a monthly parent group.

As an educator, the majority of my career has been teaching adult language learners from around the world. Throughout this period, many of my students were also caregivers and would convey their concerns about helping their children with school work in a country where they themselves had not experienced the education system, and also were not fluent in the language. I created an English for specific purposes curriculum aimed at parents of ELLs to allow them to learn the language they needed to support their child's education. Part of this project will focus on the creation of such a program for parents of multilingual learners.

The devastation caused to so many people's lives by the pandemic will never be forgotten. As teachers of multilingual learners, we must be mindful of the altered state of many of the students' lives due to the financial hardship caused by Covid 19 from which many are still struggling. This project will embrace the positives such as the empowered position parents

have due to experiencing online learning, while creating collaboration solutions tailored to the families rather than the school.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

With over five million English language learners currently in the United States, the need to improve the connection between school and home has never been greater. Sugarman and Lazarin (2020) estimated that as of 2018, around 18 million children in the United States lived with at least one immigrant parent. Almost 18% of children of immigrants were living in households with limited English proficiency in members over the age of fourteen (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). According to the same survey, 21% of these children are living with family members who have been unable to complete a high school education, in contrast to native speakers at 5% (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

Considering this data, it is clear that the need to provide valuable and achievable types of engagement for ELL families is imperative, and it is also required as part of Title III funding. According to the NCELA (n.d.), school districts are to provide, “meaningful communication with limited English proficient parents” (p. 1). However, methods of collaboration need to be reevaluated in schools in order to engage ELL families successfully and measurably in a post pandemic world. The impact of remote schooling on academic learning is still unfolding. Understanding how the pandemic has affected students and families is key to creating a more current approach to family engagement. It is important to utilize what we, as teachers, learned about our families during the remote learning period, and use this information to create the most affective collaboration for each family (Benner & Quirk, 2020; Vandergift & Greene, 1992).

The importance of English Language Learner family engagement.

Many studies have shown that regardless of socioeconomic status and/or ethnic background, students with families who are engaged in their education have a higher probability of performing well academically (Henderson & Mapp, 2022). Research has shown that such involvement has resulted in a high rate of school attendance, and more often than not, students' progress to secondary education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

One of the most prolific frameworks for school-family partnership was created by Joyce Epstein (2009), who identified six significant methods of practice: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein (2009) described the benefit of creating a strong home-school connection, "If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development" (p. 9). Epstein (2009) continued by stating:

Schools and communities talk about programs and services that are family friendly, meaning that they take in to account the needs and realities of family life, are feasible to conduct, and are equitable toward all families. When all these concepts combine, children experience learning communities (p. 11).

The key to creating a successful partnership is to acknowledge the balancing act that most ELL families are dealing with in their day-to-day lives, and therefore, implement a variety of engagement methods from which families can select the most effective for their schedule. Educators must meet parents where they are, and identify how schools can offer a wide range of opportunities in terms of ability to partner with the school in a way that fits in to their schedule

(Vandegrift & Greene, 1992). Understanding that one size does not fit all is the key to sustaining a successful school-family alliance.

To implement a strong partnership, it is essential to uncover background information about families and students. Understanding life histories, social, personal, and cultural backgrounds create an opportunity for educators to design academic instruction around this information (Espino-Calderon et al, 2020). When families can identify with the theme of a student's school work, confidence is boosted and an interest is created. For example, identifying culturally relevant books, either tangible or digital, is one approach that allows for family members to connect their life experience to the literature; therefore, engagement is created (Krasnoff, 2016).

Gallup identified over seventy studies that have been conducted on family engagement, the results of which suggest that such involvement is a positive aspect of a child's academic progress (Yu & Hodges, 2015). According to Mattingly et al (2002), "numerous studies show that parent involvement is correlated with higher student academic achievement, better student attendance, and more positive student and parent attitudes toward education" (p. 549). However, Mattingly et al (2002) continue on to describe how few quality research studies exist using numerical data to support the advantages of parental engagement.

Is family engagement overrated?

Robinson and Harris (2014) conducted surveys of families in America from the 1980s through the 2000s on the topic of the value of family engagement in conjunction with academic achievement; however, the results were inconclusive. The findings concluded that Hispanic families ranked low in their frequency of engagement, with the idea that this particular group's

value of education was limited. However, Robinson and Harris's (2014) research also found that this group of parents did indeed value their children's education as much as parents in a separate group made up of white and Asian groups. Robinson and Harris (2014) continue on to state:

After comparing the average achievement of children whose parents regularly engage in each form of parental involvement to that of their counterparts whose parents do not, we found that most forms of parental involvement yielded no benefit to children's test scores or grades regardless of racial or ethnic background or socioeconomic standing" (p. 2).

Robinson and Harris (2014) outlined an alternative view of family engagement, however, research supporting their findings is limited.

Alternatively, Rogers et al (2014) challenged the study conducted by Robinson and Harris stating that it merely suggests that there is little to no benefit related to family engagement, but fails to identify a clear case to support the statement that involvement is overrated. Rogers et al (2014) continued to highlight medical clinical trials which suggest that engagement is, "a potent, cost effective and scalable way to increase student achievement in a number of settings" (p. 2). Rogers et al (2014) discussed various school districts and the implementation of specific interventions, such as a Boston school district that created a system whereby teachers would call middle school parents in the evening with updates on a child's progress, pending assignments, and behavior. This proved advantageous and improved the rate of homework completed by forty percent (Rogers et al, 2014).

Berry et al (2012) conducted a study in India on the impact of maternal participation on academic achievement outlined in the introduction of The Right to Education Act. The Act is designed to ensure that children up to the age of fourteen receive a compulsory and free

education, however, as of 2016, 57.5 percent of children were still unable to read a Level one text (Berry et al, 2012). Thus, one of India's largest non-government organizations, Pratham, together with researchers created a study of mothers based in 240 villages. Literacy classes were created and provided to the mothers six days a week, two hours a day, with the objective being to improve both basic language and math skills (Berry et al, 2012). In addition to the classes, the mothers received weekly visits from Pratham staff who provided workbooks focused on both math and language to be completed by the children, and direct instruction was provided on the various methods of active engagement at home (Berry et al, 2012). The study concluded that the impact of the various methods of intervention practiced by the mothers during the research period were small but positive (Berry et al, 2012). When receiving all interventions such as the mothers attending class, together with workshops on how to support their children, the results were stronger with math and language test scores being the highest, therefore indicating that family engagement in many forms improves the academic status of students (Berry et al, 2012).

Barriers to English Language Learner's Family Engagement.

Families of multilingual learner's face challenges when trying to engage with the child's academic work and collaborate with the school (Smith et al, 2008; Jacques & Villegas, 2018). According to Miano (2015), many of the methods activated in the regular classroom fail to consider cultural and structural issues that numerous caregivers face within the US public school system. De Luigi and Martelli (2015) and Smith et al, (2008) discussed how the number of barriers faced by immigrant families is significantly higher than those faced by non-immigrants. With the increasing number of immigrants entering the school system each year, it is the role of

the school districts to identify the many hurdles families face in an effort to support children's academic success (De Luigi and Martelli, 2015).

In research completed by Beattie (2019) on the Hispanic community specifically, the barriers faced were language, transportation, limited social networks, cultural differences, lack of education, and life circumstances. Many of the participants in the research described their own parent's experience with school engagement as being the upkeep of the school, such as, painting, cleaning, and landscaping. The homeland experience has been that teachers are viewed as the educator and many from this community are respectful of that, while others view it as the teacher's job and it is what they get paid for. Many parents or caregivers of immigrant students hold the school in high regard, respecting the authority of the establishment and its' educators; the same community is also challenged by the demand of working multiple jobs with no allowance for days off during valuable schooling hours (Breiseth, 2011; Brewster & Railsback, 2017).

The language barrier is one of the most substantial barriers to family engagement (Cassity & Harris, 2000). In research carried out by Shiffman (2019), a lack of knowledge of the English language challenged families in a variety of directions. They are unable to read important school information sent home with their children. It is often impossible to communicate with the teacher, especially at parent-teacher conferences. Many of the parents in the study advised they were reluctant to speak English in front of native speakers, due to a lack of confidence in their abilities (Shiffman, 2019; Winthrop, R. 2022). With many schools now providing interpreters for families, the study revealed although this relieved the stress of attending meetings at the school, they would prefer to have the skills to talk directly to the teacher. Language lessons were a suggestion from the majority of the parents involved in this

research as it enables them to engage more confidently in their child's education (Shiffman, 2019).

Making families of English language learners feel welcome at the school is essential, after transitioning to a new country often under traumatic circumstance, families need to feel a sense of belonging (Espino et al, 2020; Yzquierdo, 2017). In a study completed by Baker et al (2016), caregivers were interviewed and revealed one of the greatest barriers is the level of intimidation felt when entering the school premises. In an effort to improve this situation, schools can implement changes such as recruiting front desk representatives that are bilingual in the predominant first languages of the students (New Jersey Department of Education, N.D.; Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Posters and literature around the school featuring the first languages of all the students, interpreters present at parent-teacher conferences, and inviting parents in to volunteer are all achievable examples of how to create an equitable experience for all families within a school (New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.).

Often there are inferences made by teachers regarding the lack of family engagement, which is interpreted as a lack of interest in the child's education (Beattie, J, 2019; Epstein, 2009; Arce, S, (2020). A study completed by Moosa et al (2001) focused on Arab family involvement in an urban, midwestern school district and one important barrier the families faced were time restrictions. Due to the demand for many of the fathers to work numerous jobs and the mother staying at home as the caregiver to young children, there are few opportunities to attend school meetings and events. However, Moosa (2020) found that mothers in the Arab community were conducive to learning by creating an at home learning environment, together with assisting with homework. This is contrary to the common notion that immigrant parents do not engage with their children's learning (Moosa, 2001; Beattie, J., 2019; Smith et al, 2008).

Families from the Korean community living in America also face certain barriers. Research conducted by Lim (2012) revealed that although Korean families value education and actively support learning at home, they are less likely to be involved in decision making at the school or volunteering. Interviewees from the community advised experiencing a period of adjustment, thus confidence levels were low and attending school events created anxiety (Lin, 2012). Language continues to be a barrier in this community also, together with a cultural respect for teachers which includes allowing educators to perform without interference from parents. In addition, Lin (2012) described when a group of parents commented on how attending events at school had often involved playing games that were unfamiliar and part of American life, a culture within which many of the caregivers in the families had not been raised.

The effect of the global pandemic on family engagement

In March, 2020, the world was about to change to a version that the current universal community had no prior experience with. Covid-19 affected all parts of life on a world-wide scale and was identified as a global pandemic, thus entering the population in to unknown territories of isolation and the experience of multiple deaths. While all economic groups faced major challenges, immigrant families with low socio-economic status faced some of the biggest hurdles. During the crisis, Lazarin (2020) reported on how families of English language learners were being affected:

The challenge has proven even greater for families of English Learners (ELs) and immigrant students who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic's effects. Well known equity gaps due to language, income, and immigration status have come into greater focus and are at risk of widening in the months ahead (p. 1).

During 2020, thirty-six million workers filed for unemployment benefits (Berube, 2020). One group that was particularly effected was the Hispanic community with the removal of before and after school services, and pre-kindergarten schools offering early childhood opportunities, forcing many to quit jobs to become full-time caregivers (Soltero-Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021). According to Krogstad and Lopez (2020), “As the United States locked down amid COVID-19, the unemployment rate for Hispanics increased from 4.8% in February to a peak of 18.5% in April” (p. 5), with the majority most severely impacted being Hispanic women. Many caregivers from all communities for whom remote learning was extremely difficult and challenging suffered from post pandemic mental health concerns (Krogstad & Lopez, 2020). In a study conducted by Davis et al (2021), they identified parents who struggled to help students with online learning as suffering significantly higher rates of anxiety and depression. In addition, Sugarman and Larzin (2020) discovered that in a post remote learning environment, those students that had minimal online participation could find that they are up to fourteen months behind. Never before has the home-school collaboration been more important (Winthrop, R. 2022; Russell, 2020; PPIC, 2021).

With over five million of the English language learners attending schools that have limited resources and are classed as low-income, the introduction of remote learning created an equitable in-balance in terms of education (Ghosal, 2020; Braun & Sayel, 2020). Many school districts reported less than half of multilingual learners in school actually logged into remote instruction. Families faced language and technology barriers, no access to broadband, and a lack of digital devices in school districts that were unable to provide each student with a laptop (Braun & Sayel, 2020; Lazarin, 2020). Many families had employment in essential services and

had to work during school hours, thus childcare was a huge challenge and supervision of online learning was impossible (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Soltero-Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021).

Nevertheless, with the global use of remote learning in education during this period, there were many positive elements. Soltero and Gillanders (2021) conducted interviews among the LatinX community with the objective of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of remote learning. The families interviewed advised how the home-school connection pre-pandemic had involved homework packs in both Spanish and English. Soltero and Gillanders (2021) study revealed that the families attended parent-teacher conferences and received weekly newsletters entailing class academic updates, however, they reported minimal face-to-face interaction with the teacher or school administration. The families were then asked to reflect on the remote learning experience and how that had affected the home-school connection. Soltero-Gonzalez and Gilanders (2021) continue on to state caregivers reported this as a more authentic collaboration, whilst improving their confidence in reaching out to the teacher with concerns, requests, and guidance. The variety of communication platforms utilized such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and other various text applications, were welcomed by the families (Woodson, 2021; Soltero-Gonzalez and Gilanders, 2021c). Alternatively, the report conducted by Soltero-Gonzalez and Gilanders (2021) concluded that families felt isolated and overwhelmed, with reports of difficult instructions and challenges in maintaining the children's focus, especially those with K-2 students (Soltero-Gonzalez and Gilanders, 2021).

The importance of resources for families in the post-pandemic world.

Post-pandemic, more than ever families of English language learners need guidance on how to collaborate with the school and community in order to support academic learning

(Timmons et al, 2021; Sayer & Braun, 2020). Teachers of multilingual learners also need guidance on how to achieve this in a world where student caregivers have experienced an extensive period of online learning, which for many provided intensive and immediate technology training (Woodson, 2020). As previously stated in this review, there were many challenges of remote learning, such as how families with limited literacy skills were unable to even help their younger children sign in, that is, if the families had reliable internet access to begin with (Soltero-Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021). However, as the global population emerges from the dark cloud of Covid19, the United States can begin to review and continue to implement new found strategies to create the home-school partnership. As principal of a Title I school, Woodsen (2020) described methods implemented during remote learning that encouraged 21st century collaboration. A Facebook page was created for ELL caregivers after the school identified most families actively engaging on this particular source of social media via phones. Woodsen (2021) highlights how updates were provided regularly through Facebook, together with training videos on how to help the students access and use various platforms, and updates on weekly learning goals. The school is continuing to use this as an integral method of communication with the ELL community. (Woodsen, 2021).

Research is still in the early stages regarding the many successful methods used to enforce successful collaboration during the lock-down period, however Betkowski (2021) highlighted the results of a survey conducted featuring positive outcomes:

A web-based survey of 1,067 parents and 566 teachers, along with 10 parents and 10 teachers who were individually interviewed, revealed greater empathy and patience from both sides. Forty-five per cent of parents reported an increased understanding of the

demands on teachers, while 74 per cent of teachers reported they now knew their students' families better (p. 1).

The inside views in to the lives of students created by online learning was invaluable, allowing teachers to observe families that were able to provide sufficient support and those who found it extremely challenging (Woodsen, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020; Soltero-Gonzalez & Gilanders, 2021; Lazarin, 2020). It allowed for teacher-caregiver relationships to grow and evolve on a more organic basis. Betkowski (2021) continued on to outline how many families and teachers considered that online learning created a more personal relationship, allowing them to create meaningful connections. In addition, many caregivers felt online learning allowed them to be in real time with the teacher, resulting in a virtual space that provided instant answers and information (Betkowski, 2021; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

The suggestion here is flexibility, enforcing new methods of family-teacher communication in addition to face-to-face meetings, therefore allowing for the process to evolve with technology (Breiseth, 2020). Using communication apps such as WhatsApp which proved to be popular amongst many ELL families allows for a less rigid and more relaxed method of contact (Abri et al, 2021; Breiseth, 2020). Families are able to connect from the comfort of their own homes at a time that works for them, while avoiding the challenges of having to find transportation methods and possible childcare, or the time-consuming process of getting children dressed and ready to attend a meeting alongside their caregivers. Interpreters should be provided for those families with limited English knowledge. Breiseth (2020) also discusses the use of the Talking points app, which was also a successful method of contact and one which could continue to be a beneficial tool.

In a post pandemic world where it is reported that many ELLs declined academically in all content, the Public Policy Institute of California conducted a survey in 2021 around the impact of the pandemic on academic learning. The study revealed 83% of public-school parents stated children fell behind during the pandemic, with 45% of those parents identifying that ELLs are a specific learning group to have experienced a significant decline in academic progress. With the consideration of this data, it is imperative to create a school environment that is welcoming to all caregivers and families, specifically those of ELL students, in order to work as a team to provide every opportunity to support the learning journey of the students (Jaques & Villegas, 2018; Epstein, 2010; Espino et al, 2020). Epstein (2010) discussed the importance of bilingual staff recruited as front of school administration to reduce the intimidation felt by immigrant families. This enforces the ability to ask questions in their home language about other aspects of school such as bus and school schedules, free lunches, and any other question or concern a caregiver may have (Epstein, 2010; Yzquierdo, 2017; Espino et al, 2020).

All families have strengths that can help support students at home and in the classroom. For instance, Saint-Jacques et al. (2009) discussed the value of setting aside time to meet with families in order to create valuable relationships, which also helps to build the educators understanding of the strengths and resources each family possesses. Using this information to help create a home support plan unique to each child and their family strengths allows for the creation of a constructive plan of collaboration (Yzquierdo, 2017). Kang Shin et al. (2021) reflected on the advantages of culturally responsive teaching and creating ethnically appropriate work for families to engage with at home, thus creating opportunities of cultural recognition for caregivers. Once again recognizing the fact that one size does not fit all, it is imperative that we target how each ELL family can support a student at home and nurture it, providing homework

that is achievable for the families and meeting the family where they are (Vandegrift & Greene, 1992; Benner & Quirk, 2020).

Conclusion

The need to support students and their families has become stronger as the number of English language learners within the United States school districts continues to rise. Adapting previous methods with more current and achievable approaches is vital to the success of such programs. Teachers of ELLs experience a lack in district guidance on successful family collaboration methods and spend much of their evenings researching the various methods of partnership. Creating new and innovative ways to reach families at their comfort level is imperative to each ELL student's academic journey.

In a post pandemic world, the school-family collaboration of ELL students is further challenged due to strong mitigating factors such as job losses which have in turn increased the poverty level for many English language learner families and caregivers. One important factor is to recognize, now more than ever, that one approach does not fit all. Schools must create equitable partnerships and meet caregivers with collaboration methods that are achievable in their timeframe and circumstances. Educators of ELLs must embrace all elements learned through the pandemic, and aim to alleviate the pressure felt by so many ELL caregivers to support their children's academic learning. Finally, schools must listen to the families and be mindful as to what extent they can engage.

Chapter 3: Project Design

The purpose of this chapter is to justify the rationale behind a manual aimed at ELL teachers providing specific information regarding family engagement. The primary objective of this design is to eliminate time-consuming research on home/school collaboration and create an easy-to-use how-to guide for ELL or regular classroom teachers. Methods of engagement will reflect 21st-century learning and be influenced by research conducted during the pandemic to identify successful virtual methods of collaboration. In the event of another emergency transfer to remote learning, the manual will provide options that will facilitate virtual family engagement. One of the most important purposes is to create a plan with a selection of options that reflects the needs and, more importantly, availability of the families. However, the lack of in-person, human interaction in remote learning brought with it a heightened level of anxiety for both students and families (Russell, 2020). The need for a person-to-person connection was highlighted, therefore, it is necessary to create a family engagement guide that provides a choice of both in-person and virtual communication.

Many positive outcomes resulted from remote learning, such as the caregiver/teacher relationship. Braun & Sayer (2020) stated “the connections forged between families and EL educators this spring will likely pay dividends for students down the road” (p.4). Families witnessed first-hand the daily educational process experienced by their children, thus their confidence was built through the continuous observation of the academic process, an empowerment that had failed to exist prior to the pandemic. Hopefully, this will lead to more families being willing to collaborate with schools in achievable ways. Furthermore, teachers witnessed the limitations faced by many students when attempting to study at home. Braun and

Sayer documented such observations as, “from not having quiet, individual space at home to do schoolwork to the very real need of many families to work long hours to put food on the table” (p. 4). This knowledge should allow both ELL and regular teachers to create collaboration opportunities that work for each individual family and not a one size-fits-all mentality.

Providing both ELL and regular teachers with a guide on the home/school connection helps educate in an area that is often most challenging due to language and cultural barriers on both sides. Gonzales and Gabel advise, “teachers lack critical information about CLD parents and diverse representations of parental involvement, they may also lack the training needed to work effectively with CLD students” (p. 67). The existence of a research-based guide allows for a teacher to work on creating a plan rather than the typical process of endless hours of research to identify valuable and measurable methods.

The value of including digital forms of collaboration is imperative in a post-pandemic environment. Winthrop (2022) discusses the importance of bringing schools to families and not just families to schools. In an example from a school district in India, Winthrop outlines how family involvement increased from 20 to 80 percent during the pandemic using Facebook, Whatsapp, and texting as methods of communication. Prior to Covid-19, this particular school district struggled to engage caregivers; however, integrating 21st-century methods improved the situation dramatically and they continue to embrace the new forms of engagement.

Many teachers have limited knowledge and experience of how to effectively collaborate with families. According to Winthrop (2022):

“Education leaders, teachers, and school personnel rarely get any in-depth training and professional development on the specific skills and approaches needed to work with

families and community members. In the United States, less than half of the 50 states require learning about effective family and community engagement strategies to become a school leader, and less than a third of states require it to become a teacher".

Research constantly addresses the value of the home-school connection and yet school districts fail to create professional development around this issue. In my own personal experience, there has been no training for teachers or conversations about how to improve collaboration. The main reason is that teachers are overwhelmed with the amount of work that is expected of them already, adding yet another layer could contribute to the increased exodus of experienced and valuable instructors internationally. Providing a how-to guide that provides many achievable and measurable options that can be utilized in their own time is an effective method of eliminating the stress of having to research yet another task.



(source: clipart-library.com)

CREATING A HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION: A GUIDE FOR ELL TEACHERS.

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[Source: ColorinColorado](#)

Introduction

This how-to manual is a guide for ELL teachers on collaborating with families or caregivers in a post-pandemic world. The manual could also be used by classroom teachers to educate on how to create a family/teacher relationship. The guide includes a variety of methods, activities, and digital platforms that teachers can utilize to nurture a successful home-school alliance. Remote learning allowed families and caregivers to enter in to a new era in terms of their technology navigation skills, thus the manual will take advantage of those new-found abilities.

The guide will provide a multitude of research-based methods to help form strong partnerships. However, the objective is for teachers to browse and select depending on the level of involvement they are seeking. This project was designed with consideration to time limitations faced by teachers and families, therefore the manual is easy to navigate and includes accessible materials. The guide will be continuously updated and also includes an Instagram link to post requests and ideas that you would like to be included in the manual.

What Is Title III?

Title III is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the 'Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015' (ESSA). The purpose of Title III is to help ensure that English learners (ELs) attain English language proficiency and meet state academic standards. Federal funding is provided through various grant programs to assist state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) in accomplishing this. Some funds are offered to entities other than SEAs and LEAs, and SEAs and LEAs also offer subgrants to other entities. (NCELA).

It is important for all ELL teachers to be familiar with Title III and how it protects EL learners. Part of Title III protects the rights of parents or caregivers in regards to home/school collaboration

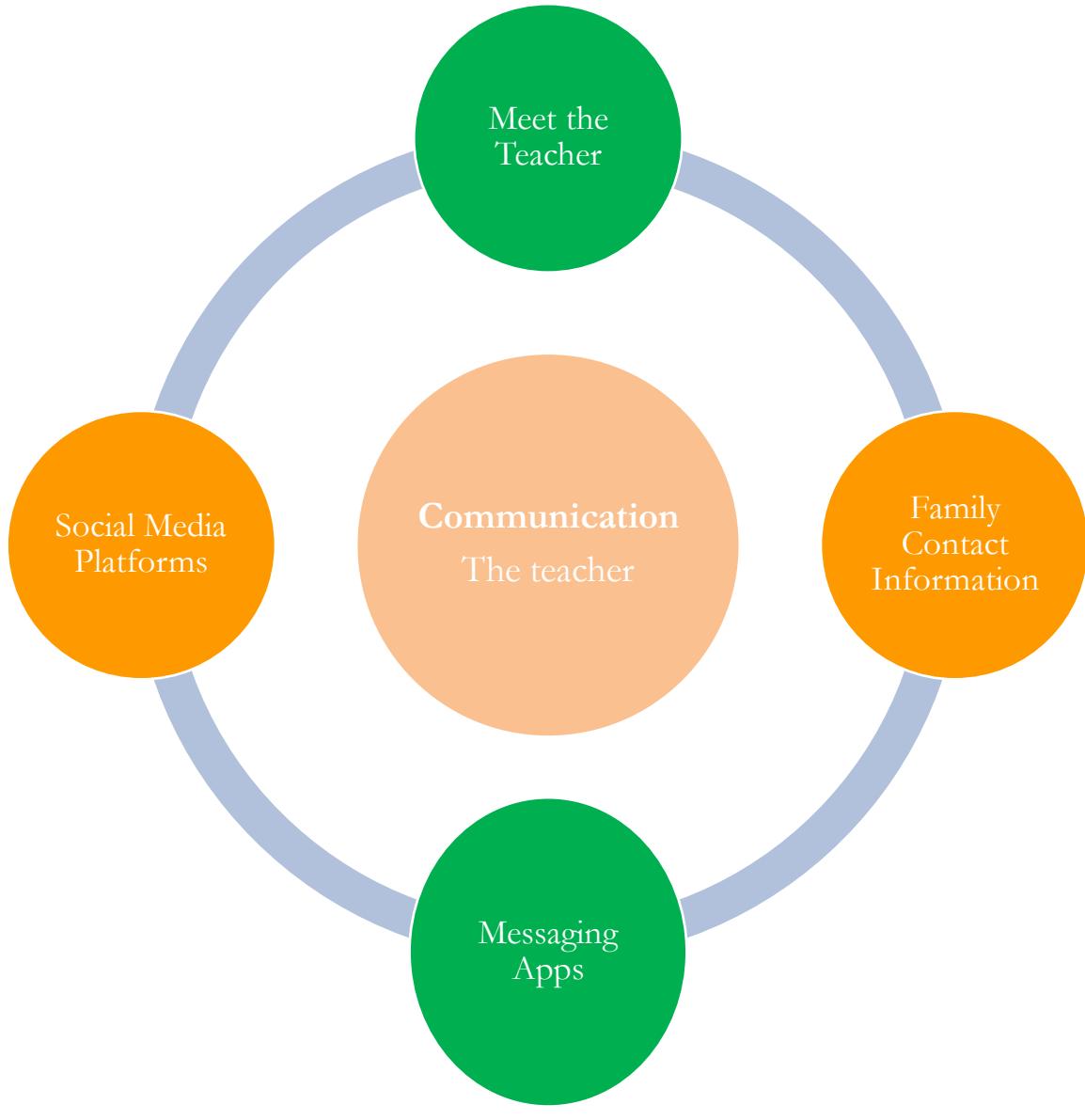
A. Parental Notification

1. Notify parents of the reasons for the identification of their child as limited English proficient and in need of placement in a language instruction program;
2. The method of instruction used in the program and the methods if instruction used in other available programs, including how these programs differ in content, instruction goals, and use of English and native language in instruction;
3. How the program will meet the educational strengths and needs of their child;
4. How such a program will specifically help their child learn English, and meet age appropriate academic achievement standards for grade promotion and graduation;
5. The specific exit requirements for such programs, the expected rate of transition from such programs into classrooms that are not tailored for limited English proficient children.
6. In the case of a child with a disability, parents should be informed of how the child's instructional program meets the objectives of the individualized educational program of the child.
7. Parents should receive information about their right to decline enrollment or remove their child from an instructional program. They will also be informed of the option to choose another method of instruction, if available.
8. Parents will be assisted in selecting from among various programs and methods of instruction, if more than one program or method is offered.
9. All who receive funds provided under Title III to provide a language instruction education program, that have failed to make progress on the annual measurable achievement objectives, shall inform all parents of children identified for participation in such programs of this failure, within 30 days

B. Parental Participation

1. All who receive Title III funds shall implement an effective means of outreach to parents of limited English proficient parents.
2. They must inform parents of how they can be involved in the education of their children and how they can assist their children to learn achieve at high levels in core academic subjects and how they can help their children meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet.
3. This outreach shall include holding and sending notices of opportunities for regular meetings for the purpose of formulating and responding to recommendations from parents of limited English proficient students





- ❖ As the ELL teacher, there are many options for collaboration. Selecting methods that work for you and your families is key to creating a successful partnership with families or caregivers. Being mindful to the availability of your families and their time restrictions is imperative to the success of the home-school connection.

Communication

Select the options below that work for you. Whether you have time to utilize all of the methods or can only use one or two, it will help your program create a successful home-school-collaboration

❖ **Meet the Teacher!**

Corresponding with families during the first month of school opens an initial dialogue and helps create a rapport. This can be achieved by sending out an introductory letter in paper or digital format. Format your own letter or search for free versions online or through teacherspayteachers.com. Translate in to the first languages of your students.



❖ **Family Contact Information**

Collect the caregiver's contact information for each student and record on a digital document. First, use the school districts data collection site to access this information. If a contact number is not available, send home a note with the student for the caregiver to complete with their contact information and return it to school.

Once the 'meet the teacher' letter has been sent out, follow up with each family to confirm the contact numbers are correct. This is important documentation as it will allow you to stay in contact whether it is regarding updates on the student, or providing materials to encourage the caregiver to support the learner at home. If you cannot locate the information, the Home Language Survey is also a good point of reference for such documentation.

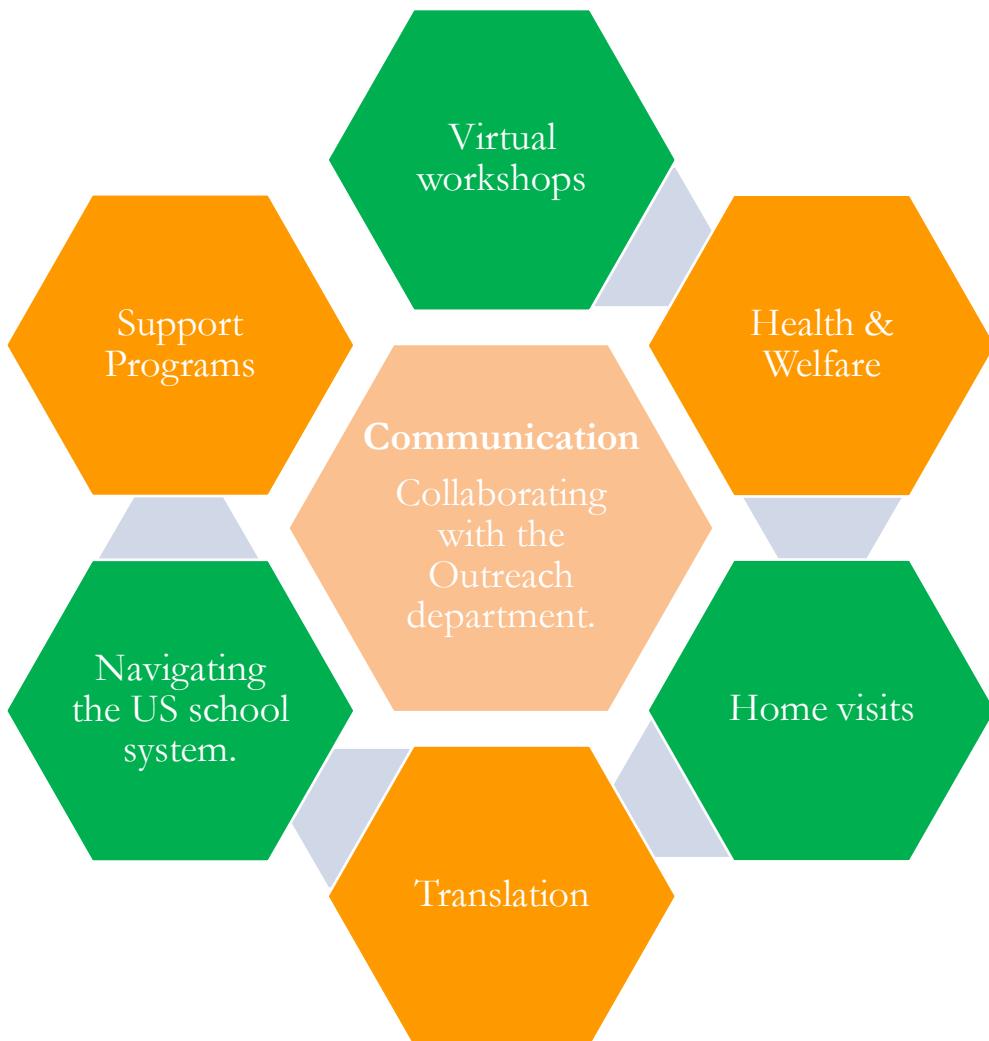
School Name: Teacher's Name:		Parent Contact Information			Content Grade
		Student Name	Parent Name	Phone Number	Email address
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					

- ❖ Select a messaging app to create a caregiver group. Identify which app your families are comfortable using and set up a group contact. Remember to only select an app that has the capacity to translate into your families first languages. This allows you to send information, concerns, or digital materials to support at-home learning. It opens the door for families to communicate directly with you and also other parents within the group, therefore creating a sense of community.



- ❖ Set up an ELL department social media page for the teacher and families to utilize. This allows you to post updates on what the students are working on in ELL class, examples of work completed, success stories, and materials to work on at home. Once again, it allows families to comment and gives them a voice to express their concerns or ideas around their children's academic journey. This platform can be used in so many different ways to create collaboration, for example, providing details on health and welfare facilities within the school district. Many of our families, especially newcomers, find it challenging to navigate the healthcare system and require guidance wherever possible. Translate all information into the first languages of the families.





- ❖ It is important to collaborate with the **Community Outreach department** as their role is to support **ELLs** and their caregivers within the school district. In a post pandemic and technology centered world, using digital forms of communication can help reach more families.
- ❖ Community Outreach are using such methods and will have a website which the teacher can also access. If you do not have a **Community Outreach department** or you do but resources are limited, the following methods can be utilized or redesigned to suit your requirements. These methods help to empower families.

- ❖ Community Outreach offer translation and interpreter services for all ELL students. If you are in a small school district, it is possible that the in-person translators are predominantly Spanish speaking. However, a service will be available for you which provides access to a variety of translators/interpreters. Outreach will be able to direct you to such services. Here is an example of services that should be provided to families to improve home-school communication:

Source: Orange County Schools, NC.

OCS TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION SERVICES			
SERVICES	WHAT'S NEEDED	HOW TO REQUEST	TIME NEEDED
TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENTS	Please send the original document in electronic format. No PDF.	Request translations and interpretation form. Please indicate the date when you need the document	Please allow 3-5 days. If is a large document within 5 to 15 school business days. Depending on the length of document, language difficulty, number of translation request, etc., the time may vary up to 6 weeks.
INTERPRETATION	Parent Conference/ Parent Nights	Use our request form.	Please allow 7 business days in advance. For parent nights 10-15 business days.
CONNECTED CALLS	Weekly principal's message	Please use this form to request ConnectEd message in Spanish with the message that you need to send. You can send an email and the connect call- this can't be longer than 3 minutes.	We need the message by Friday morning.
EMERGENCY CALLS	Emergency calls due to illness or behavior or serious incident	Call Sandra Blefko at 919-644-3200 x 15508 or at 919-452-4847 If you can't reach me call 919-732-4166 x 19000	Same day
NON EMERGENCY CALLS FROM PARENTS	Parent call about academic or behavior of a student	Use this form with the detail message including the name of the student and the information that you want to give the parents.	This call will be completed within 24 hours

- ❖ Home visits are a form of collaboration and can create a positive connection between you and the families outside of the school environment. It allows the parents to ask questions and voice concerns that they may not feel comfortable doing, or have time to do, on school premises. Families can learn simple methods of engagement during the visit as you model activities with the student(s). The teacher is also exposed to the child's learning environment which can help you adapt the student's learning path to correlate to their home setting.

If you do not speak the home language of the family, then you will need to take an interpreter with you. If you are a beginner teacher or have not conducted home visits previously, consult with your Outreach department or the school social worker who is also experienced in the steps required to perform a home visit.

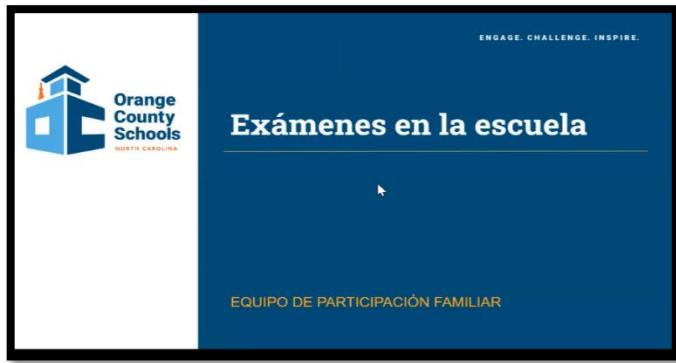


Source: Youtube

- ❖ The education system of the United States is complex and difficult to navigate, especially for those families with language and cultural barriers. Newcomer families specifically face many challenges in this area. Providing workshops or digital/written guidance to guide families in this area is extremely helpful, it builds confidence in the caregivers and further develops the level of family engagement by alleviating the level of intimidation education systems create. Open the link for the complete presentation in English and Spanish.

[School Setup Slides.pdf \(Source: Orange County Schools, NC\)](#)

- ❖ Educating parents on how testing works within the school system provides them with further knowledge to empower their level of engagement. Host a live workshop to present this information to parents and record it for others to view in their own time. Open link for a sample presentation.

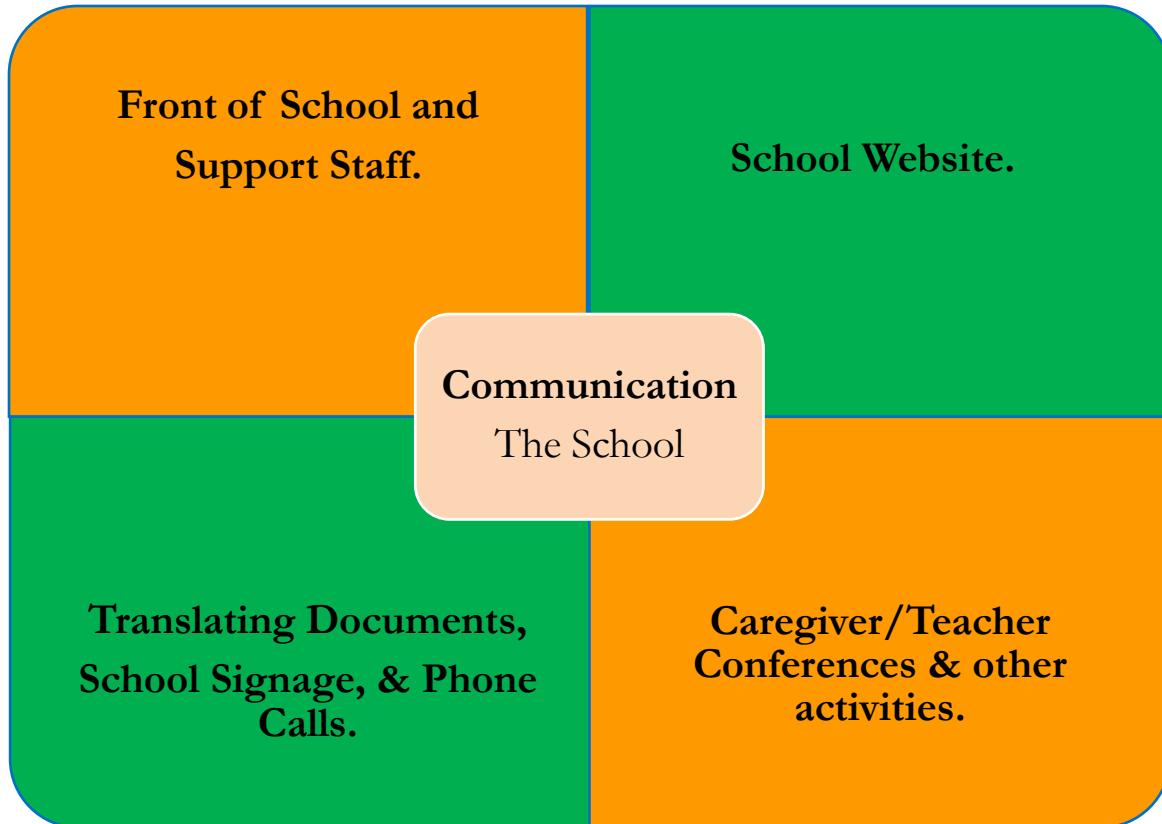


[Exam Presentation.pdf](#) (Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

- ❖ Understanding report cards can be extremely challenging, especially when all the information is in English. Working with your school to translate into the home language is important, as well as educating families on how to interpret the report. Host a live virtual workshop to educate the families and record it for others to watch in their own time. Open the link for the complete presentation in English and Spanish.



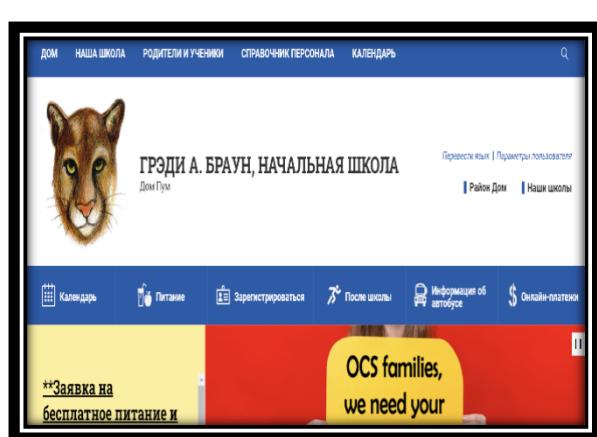
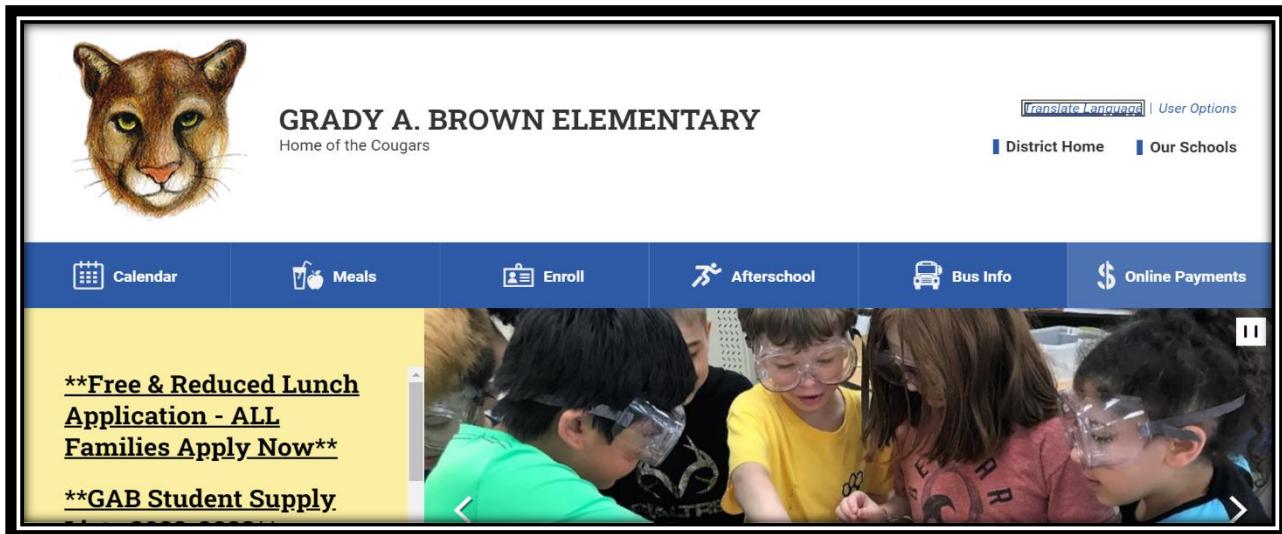
[Report Card Slides.pdf](#) (Source: Orange County Schools, NC)



The school setting is the focal point for families, teachers, and support staff. There are many approaches to creating an equitable learning space for all students and their families.

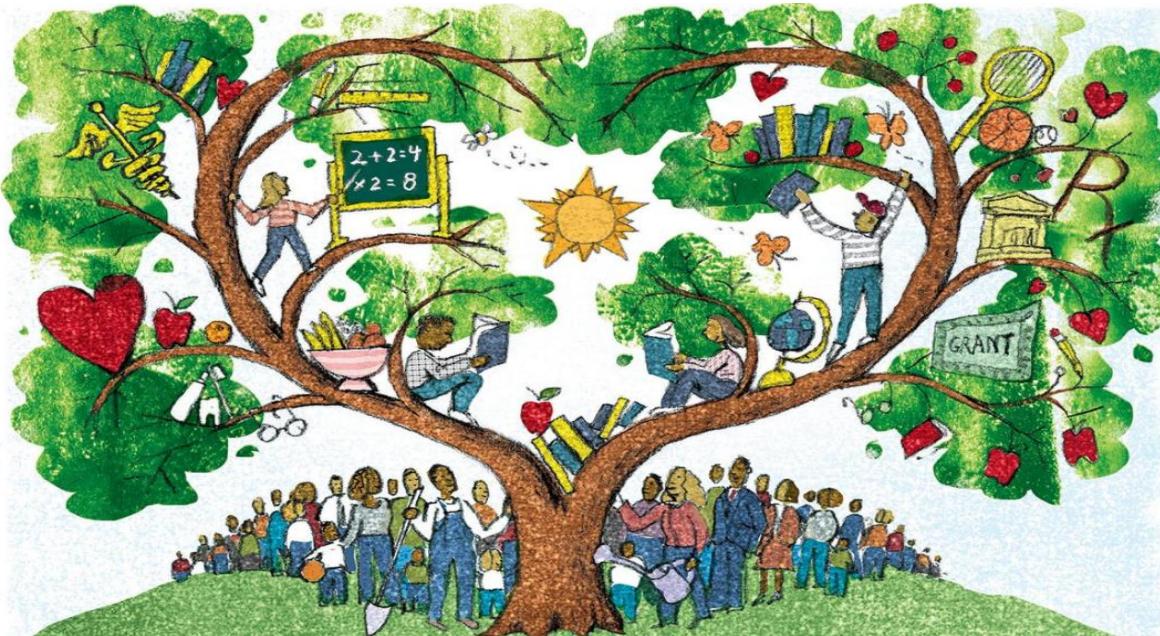
- ❖ Front of school staff are vital to creating a welcoming environment for all families. Encouraging leadership to hire bilingual employees to operate the front office is highly beneficial. It is an integral part of removing the intimidation felt by most parents of ELLs about entering the school building. Knowing there is a representative to greet them in their first language encourages future engagement.
- ❖ One major part of communicating with caregivers is to translate all documents and reports sent home into the first language of the families. Observe signage around the school and add translations into all languages spoken in the school. In addition, phone calls made by the school should be available in all languages spoken in the district.

- ❖ The school website is an integral part of communicating with parents. In a technology driven world, an increasing amount of families are seeking information from the school site, therefore the school must provide a translate option for ELL families to read in their first language. The example linked below highlights a school website with an option to translate at the top right of the page.



(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

Source: aft.org



Community Collaboration

Community organizations often have the skills, knowledge, and resources to help create services or an event that far exceed the expertise and/or financial abilities of a school district. They are an invaluable ally in terms of connecting with the families of ELLs. For example, providing information on health and welfare, tutoring, and English classes.

The following information can be used to present to your families, alternatively it can be used to educate the ELL teacher on community resources that exist for families of ELLs.

Just as family partners are great supporters of students' social-emotional and academic growth, the same is true of community partners. They, too, can be invaluable to the success of students. To create successful community partnerships, it is essential to identify, build, and sustain partners who operate from the same strength-based approach that we use.

-Espino-Calderon et al.

Methods of Collaboration

Host a newcomer night.
Invite community stakeholders to support, educate, and inform families.

[Newcomer Night Pdf](#)
(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

Create a contact list of essential health and welfare providers. Provide this to families or on an individual basis.

[Community Contact PDF](#)
(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

Connect and Educate families on community support networks.

[Education Support Pdf](#)
(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

Collaborate with health and welfare organizations in the district for each language of ELLs.

[Health & Welfare Pdf](#)
(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)

Provide information on education support for both adult family members and children.

[Education support pdf](#)
(Source: Orange County Schools, NC)



Decision Making

- ❖ Provide platforms for ELL families to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the school and their children's education. The ELL community of caregivers often feel intimidated and are hesitant to join such groups as the PTA for many reasons, often the primary barrier is language. Creating alternative choices of collaboration aimed at decision making is advisable, create a safe and equitable environment where ELL families can gather. This can be in-person or virtual.

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students."

— Joyce Epstein, "School/Family/Community Partnerships," *Phi Delta Kappan*

The following framework was created by Joyce Epstein who continues to be instrumental in school, family, and community partnerships. Epstein has conducted extensive research, which is a valuable resource for all ELL teachers.

(Source: freepik.com)

Epstein's Framework of Involvement – Decision Making

TYPE 5 DECISION MAKING Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.	
Sample Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation. • Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements. • District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement. • Information on school or local elections for school representatives. • Networks to link all families with parent representatives. 	
Challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school. • Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents. • Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups. 	
Redefinitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.</i> • <i>Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.</i> 	
Results for Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of representation of families in school decisions. • Understanding that student rights are protected. • Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students. 	
Results for Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input into policies that affect child's education. • Feeling of ownership of school. • Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions. • Shared experiences and connections with other families. • Awareness of school, district, and state policies. 	
Results for Teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions. • View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles. 	

Family/Caregiver Decision Making Group.

Create family decision making groups for each community of ELL caregivers. The groups will be similar to those of the PTA. However it should be conducted in the first language of each community, therefore removing the challenge of language barriers which stop many ELL caregivers from joining school groups.

Gather information from the parents on days, times, virtual, or in-person preferences. Collect the data by sending out a digital or in-person form translated into the first language. The in-person choice should include child-care and food to help reach all caregivers.

Example of form Pdf

[\(Source: Orange County Schools, NC\)](#)

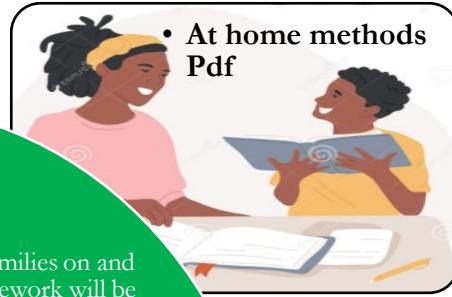
Introduce a family group that allows caregivers to voice their concerns, opinions, and ideas in a safe environment. Communicating in their first language and with other members of their communities creates a strong sense of collaboration. The ELL teacher must then communicate this feedback to the school improvement team, or directly to the principal. This step is vital in affirming the families' relevance in the school setting.

Example of [invitation](#) family meeting Pdf

Learning at Home.



Meet parents where they are and their ability to help learners at home. Use the desired message system and send a weekly readaloud. Youtube has a wide variety of culturally appropriate stories.



Advise families on and how homework will be sent home. Include methods on how to help using simple methods. Digital workshops are a great way to reach parents in their own time.



Host a family STEM, math, and ELA night at school. Include interactive learning games that families can engage with and recreate at home. In addition, send home a STEM activity for ELLs to complete with their families.



Provide easy to understand descriptions of what skills each grade requires. This must be easy to follow and comprehend. Conduct a digital workshop and post the recording on the ELL social media page.

Sources: Youtube / freepik.com / vivifystem.com / istockphoto.com

Family/Caregiver Support

Curriculum and instruction can be greatly enhanced when teachers and administrators learn about students' participation in their family homes, communities and kinship networks.

-Mogge et al.



- ❖ Provide families with information on how to create a learning environment at home. Educate on what learners need to help them complete work at home. Be sure to reach all families and use their preferred method of communication.

<https://www.waterford.org/resources/how-to-create-an-at-home-learning-space/>

- ❖ Locate workshops, both virtual or in-person, on family nutrition, with a focus on affordable methods. Alternatively, create your own workshops in collaboration with the Outreach program.

- ❖ Create a 'get-to-know you' activity for teacher and parent to become more familiar with each other. The more familiar families are with the teacher, the more they will communicate needs and concerns.

- ❖ If families are facing a language barrier, send a link with a list of language classes in the area. It is important to provide virtual options as many ELL parents have limited time outside of their work and family commitments.

<https://www.chccs.org/Page/6260>

- ❖ The Outreach department offers guidance to families on how to educate themselves on the school system. Review their website which has extremely useful resources for ELL teachers.

Refer back to the communication section of the manual for methods families can use to establish a safe and successful home learning environment.

(Source: istockphoto.com)



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Chapter 5: Conclusion

The families of English language learners have continuously faced many challenges when trying to connect with their children's academic journey. However, life changed for everyone in March 2020 when a global pandemic was declared and countless lives were lost. Families of ELLs particularly faced extremely difficult times and are still trying to recover both emotionally and financially. Now, more than ever, it is important for teachers of multilingual students to educate themselves on the most effective methods of collaboration, to help families to engage in their children's education.

Due to the hardships of Covid-19 that many ELL caregivers are still experiencing, the most effective partnership strategy is meeting them where they are and not overwhelming with unattainable goals. Teachers must communicate with families to identify the level of engagement they are capable of and the limitations they face due to family and work commitments. Building strong relationships is key to creating a collaboration that works to the advantage of the learner, once this is achieved, the barriers are lifted and the future academic success of their children is raised.

While the pandemic challenged families, it also educated them on the day-to-day expectations placed on their children. In addition, caregivers were provided with technology training in real-time, with many becoming familiar with Canvas and Zoom. Utilizing this knowledge is essential to the future of engaging families in the learning experience, therefore teachers must identify approaches that work for each family. With many ELLs having regressed academically due to the challenges of remote learning, the home-school connection has never been more important.

As a parent myself, I witnessed the challenges learners faced when trying to connect with online learning and the social-emotional distress caused by being out of the classroom. However, my children and I were fortunate in that we did not face the additional barriers of language and culture. The desire to attempt to make a difference for the families of our English language learners drove the decision to write a thesis on how to successfully engage caregivers on their terms.

As part of their role, ELL teachers are expected to collaborate with families, however, there is no manual or guide provided to help educate them on how to achieve this. Educators are expected to research this area in their own time, in addition to the many other job requirements which can be challenging especially as a beginner teacher. Therefore, I decided to create a how-to guide for ELLs and classroom teachers that includes materials together with examples of how to achieve various forms of partnership. In addition, it was important to provide a document that educated on the laws as well as collaborative partners, such as the outreach department. Also, a vital component was to reduce the time ELL educators spend on researching yet another area of their role. Furthermore, it was necessary to provide a wide variety of collaboration methods from which the teacher can select based on their families' availabilities.

In the future, I would like to see this manual integrated into my current school district's professional development and be made available to all teachers, specifically ELL educators. The manual will be continuously updated based on research approved methods and through teacher experiences. It is vital that we support our families to empower them to create a successful academic experience for their children.

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